

SWAHILI FORUM 23 (2016): 21-46

SWAHILI MODERN PROVERBS: THE ROLE OF LITERARY WRITERS AND SOCIAL NETWORK USERS

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Proverbs are one of the important oral literary genres in various cultures. Though in many societies and for a long time proverbs are regarded as succinct fixed artistic form, and authoritative which contain a general truth, wisdom and experience of the society and its creators are elders or anonymous, these characteristics are increasingly challenged today. This paper, therefore, intends to examine how Swahili literary writers and social network users participate in the creation and spread of Swahili modern proverbs¹ in Tanzania. Data of this study were collected from Swahili literary works and websites. The findings reveal that the need to address and cope with today's environment and change of worldview of the present generation are among the important factors to the emergence of the modern proverbs. It is also noted that modern Swahili proverbs are not only found among the Kiswahili literary writers and social network users, but also other people and avenues.

Methali ni moja ya utanzu muhimu wa fasihi simulizi katika tamaduni mbalimbali. Ingawa katika jamii nyingi na kwa muda mrefu methali zimekuwa zikichukuliwa kama usemi mfupi wa kisanaa, wenye mamlaka, ukweli, maarifa na tajiriba ya jamii, na watungaji wake ni wazee au hawajulikani, sifa hizi siku hizi zinazidi kudadisiwa. Makala hii, kwa hiyo, inalenga kuchunguza namna waandishi wa fasihi ya Kiswahili na watumiaji wa mitandao ya kijamii wanavyoshiriki katika uundaji na usambazaji wa methali za kileo za Kiswahili nchini Tanzania. Data za makala hii zilikusanywa kwa kupitia kazi mbalimbali za fasihi ya Kiswahili na kutembelea tovuti. Matokeo ya data yanaonesha kuwa haja ya kuakisi mazingira ya sasa na mabadiliko ya kimtazamo kwa kizazi cha leo ni miongoni mwa sababu zinazochangia katika kuibuka kwa methali za kileo. Aidha, methali za kileo za Kiswahili si tu zinapatikana miongoni mwa wanafasihi wa Kiswahili na watumiaji wa mitandao ya kijamii, bali pia zinatumika na watu na miktadha mbalimbali.

Introduction

Proverb, though not easy to define, is regarded as the saying in more or less fixed form marked by 'shortness, sense, and salt' and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth. It is also marked by some kind of poetic quality in style or sense (Finnegan 2012: 383). It is insightful, well-structured observations or commentaries on life that appear to sum up the accumulated knowledge, wisdom and experience of the society in question vis-a-vis the subject being referred to (Mulokozi 1999: 7-8, see also Madumulla 1998-2001:258). Over the centuries proverbs, before writing, have been passed on mainly through oral traditions. Although proverb is characterized by "(1) its concise fixed artistic form; (2) its evaluative and conservative function;

¹ In this paper the term is used in the same way as anti-proverbs, post-proverbials or supplementary proverbs (see for example Raji-Oyelade 1999, Mieder 2004, Mnenuka 2012, Kipacha 2014, Daniel 2016).

(3) its authoritative validity; and (4) its anonymous origin” (Schipper 2006:22) at present the veracity of many proverbs are negated. The view that proverbs as a wisdom of elders has been challenged as well as “deconstructed and reconstructed” (Fayemi 2009, Balogun 2010 in Daniel 2016:4). Thus, some proverbs are unreasonable by virtue of their pre-justice and irrelevance to modern day realities. In other words, they are old-fashioned (Fayemi 2009:16).

Anti-proverbs are defined as “parodied, twisted, or fractured proverbs that reveal humorous or satirical speech play with traditional proverbial wisdom” (Mieder 2004: 28). In the same way Raji-Oyelade (1999: 75) defines post-proverbs or supplementary proverbs as “alternate creations derived from and which stand against traditional proverbs.” For instance, Mieder argues that proverbs are twisted from their original wordings and structures in form and content and bring about a different meaning, which is often diametrically opposed to the original meaning. The truth of these formulaic carriers of wisdom is devalued, ridiculed or sharply negated through ironic or satiric distortions of letters or words, additions or contractions. This change is the expression of a transformed social reality and world view, which rests on the principle of "constancy in change", the outcome of social developments, the process of re-evaluation (in Militz & Militz 1999: 28-33, see also Daniel 2016), development of science and technology, globalization, rejection of some African cultural practices (Mnenuka 2012, Kipacha 2014) and trend of African politics and leadership.

Studies about anti-proverbs or post-proverbs have increased in various societies (see Raji-Oyelade 1999, Mieder 1997, 2007, 2009, 2014, Mutembei 2007, Litovkina et al. 2008, Jegede 2008, Balogun 2010, Taiwo 2010, Reznikov 2012, Doyle et. al. 2012, Mnenuka 2012, Kipacha 2014, Daniel 2016, among others). In Tanzania modern proverbs are increasingly gaining popularity. For instance, among the Haya of Kagera, Mutembei (2007:81) points out that several modern proverbs emerged to reflect the AIDS pandemic. For example, the traditional proverb *Kama hujui kufa, chungulia kaburi* (If you don't know death, look at the grave) was altered to *Kama hujui kufa, angalia mwenye UKIMWI* (If you don't know death, look at the AIDS patient)². This is because before the introduction of the ARVs many HIV infected persons died and they had also sores, frequent and repeated fever, diarrhea, vomiting, torn hair, and becoming too emaciated. Likewise, Mnenuka (2012) reveals the existence and use of new Swahili proverbs and sayings in social media networks. He also acknowledges their existence on sign boards, mobile phones, daily discourse and the radio and television stations. Swahili modern proverbs and modern sayings³ are also widely written on means of transport in Tanzania (see Kipacha 2014).

² I treat it as a proverb because it also looks similar to traditional proverb *Kama hujui kufa mtazame mfu* (If you don't know death, look at the dead person). See King'ei and Ndalur 2009: 99.

³ In this study my focus is on proverbs only.

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Despite these pioneering works, generally, studies in Swahili modern proverbs and/or in other societies are still scanty. For instance, Mieder pleads with scholars worldwide to undertake more research in both paremiography (the collection of proverbs) and paremiology (the study of proverbs) of especially “new proverbs⁴ that are still awaiting the registration in proverb collections” instead of mainly “occupying themselves with traditional proverbs” (Mieder 2014: 14, see also Taylor 1939: 45, Mieder 1997 in Mieder 2014). With regard to “changes”⁵ in Swahili literature, many studies have been done in written literary genres such as poetry, novels and drama (cf. Khamis 2005, 2007, Senkoro 2006, Indede 2008, to mention a few). Hence, the present study intends to contribute further to the scholarship of the modern proverbs. I examine modern proverbs in Swahili written literature and online social network sites, namely. weblogs⁶ (website where entries that an author created are frequently updated and intended for general public consumption) and an internet forums⁷ (discussion area on a website where ideas and views on a particular issue can be exchanged) and their roles in society. As Kiswahili is daily expanding in terms of its usage (Chebet-Choge 2012, Mnenuka 2012), in fact, literary works and social network sites are viable source of data for its contemporary scholarship. The two sources (books and digital media) have been chosen to acknowledge and emphasize their contribution to this topic.

In terms of the methodology, the data of this study was collected by reading Swahili literary works and online search based on Tanzania. In the process of the data collection, a couple of Kiswahili literary works and colleagues were consulted. Finally, I managed to gather the data from four literary works, namely, Mhando’s *Lina Ubani* (1984), Mochiwa’s *Mvumilivu Hula Mbovu* (1988), Mbogo’s *Vipuli vya Figo* (1996) and Kezilahabi’s *Dhifa* (2008). Although there might be other Swahili literary works that contain other new proverbs, but I could not reach them during my study. Regarding the data from the social networks the words “new/modern Kiswahili proverbs or methali mpya” were searched online. In total, I successfully secured about 100 proverbs from <http://www.jamiiforums.com> and <http://wavuti.weebly.com/news-blog/>⁸.

Apart from this introduction, in the following sections the paper discusses the modern proverbs extracted from these two sources, starting with the data collected from the literary works. The paper ends with brief remarks. At the far end the paper is also appended by some proverbs which were not used in the main text.

⁴ Mieder (2014) proposes that the 1900 might be cut-off year for being considered a modern proverb.

⁵ Reference is made to the experimental literature (*fasihi ya majaribio*).

⁶ <http://www.networksolutions.com/support/what-is-a-weblog-blog/> (last visited 05-09-2016)

⁷ <http://www.wisegeek.org/what-is-an-internet-forum.htm> (last visited 05-09-2016)

⁸ Similar data from this blog was also found in various other blogs (see Reference section).

Modern Proverbs in Written Swahili Literature

Proverbs as a genre of oral tradition are not isolated sayings, but rather as just one aspect of artistic expression within a whole social and literary context. Thus, the actual use of proverbs, meanings and their full understanding depend so crucially on their contexts such as in actual speech acts, literary works, the mass and print media, advertisements, popular songs, cartoons, and the like (Yankah 1984, 1989, 1999, Brunvand 1996 in Militz & Militz 1999, Mulokozi 1996, 1999, Schipper 2006, Finnegan 2012 to mention a few). Due to the parasitic nature of proverbs, the modern proverbs analysed in this paper are based on the Swahili literary works and the social network sites. In this discussion (hereafter) I refer to the traditional Swahili proverb as TP and modern proverb as MP. The two versions of the proverbs are presented alongside for ease of analytical comparison.

The Swahili literary writers are among the substantial pioneers in creating and using MPs. According to our knowledge; writers such as playwrights, poets and novelists since a couple of decades ago incorporated them in their works. Penina Mhando, a Tanzanian scholar, practitioner of popular theatre and Swahili playwright is among them. She uses a MP in the title of her book as follows:

1

MP1 (...) *Lina Ubani* (There is a Panacea).

TP1 *La Kuvunda Halina Ubani* (There is no panacea for what is rotten).

The play mainly focuses on the importance of building a new society following Tanzania's war with Idi Amini of Uganda in 1978-1979 which resulted into economic hardships. The play also partly talks about the poor implementation of socialist policy that Tanzania followed after independence (mainly from 1967 till mid 1980s when free market economy was introduced). According to URT (1967) in a socialist society there is existence of democracy. There are neither classes of people nor exploitation of others. Thus, "through socialism all people were assumed to be equal, however, few years later, it became evident that the implementation of this system was difficult if not impossible" (Senkoro & Matondo 1997: 59-60). *Lina Ubani* and other plays published after 1978, present a more critical analysis of the socialist constructive process, portraying the disillusion and the helplessness of the masses in the face of the mounting corruption and exploitation by members of the ruling class (Banham & Woodyard 1994: 114).

Mhando in her play sees that issues such as economic and life hardship, injustice (forceful removal of people from their traditional villages to the new ones), bad leadership, recklessness, theft, and plunder by some leaders can be remedied (Mbunda 1991). Even if Mhando did not use the first part of the TP, her use of the altered second part is very appropriate to convey the

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intended message. This is confirmed by Yankah when he says “Proverbs have multiple meanings depending on the contexts” (Yankah 1984: 9). Mhando, while criticizing postcolonial leaders and politics and a failing of socialist ideology followed by Tanzania, was optimistic that the evils or mistakes occurred during its implementation can be rectified or remedied someday.

Another Swahili scholar to integrate an MP on his literary work is a renowned sociolinguist, Zakaria Mochiwa. Mochiwa also uses MP on the title of his book:

2

MP2 *Mvumilivu Hula Mbovu* (A Patient person eats the rotten fruit)⁹.

TP2 *Mvumilivu Hula Mbivu* (A Patient person eats the ripe fruit).

With regard to this proverb, Lodhi (1980: 4) notes that similar occurrence was prevalent since the 1970s where sometimes traditional Swahili proverbs marked both the opposite¹⁰ and a mixed meaning. Thus, ‘One who is patient eats the ripe fruit’ can also be ‘One who is patient eats the rotten fruit’ or ‘One who is patient eats the ripe or the rotten fruit’. Lodhi’s observation does not only show that TPs have variants and are “contradictory” (Yankah 1984) but also hints on the existence of MPs in Swahili society.

Mochiwa’s poems which were composed between 1973 and 1983 also deal with post colonial Tanzania and after the declaration of socialist ideology in 1967. His poems, especially *Mvumilivu* (A patient person) insists that a patient person will ultimately eat a rotten stuff (p. 66). The book seems to address various issues such as social, political and economic disillusionment and urges for change. While literary works written in the 1960s mainly celebrated the country’s flag-independence, praised its leaders and were enthusiastic to politics of socialism and self reliance, from the late 1970s onwards the literary critics rather became critical on issues such as politics and economy as they question them and show their despair and impatience. They saw that fruits of the independence are benefited and enjoyed by the few leaders and leave the masses in poverty. This proverbial title “conveys a strong message that advocates for changes in society” (Kipacha 2014:106), intends to persuade and capture attention of the readers, as proverbs “serve to emphasize and concretise the intended message” (Mulokozi 1999:8) and “the quote provides a safe way to criticise, mock or even to insult” (Schipper 2006:23). The alteration of the TPs shows the fact that proverb’s truth and culture-bound collective ideals are being contested.

⁹ See also Mnenuka (2012) and Kipacha (2014).

¹⁰ Lodhi says that he got these meanings from his friends (poets) Ahmed S. Faris and Habib A. Salim from Mombasa, Kenya whose poems published in LUGHA Vol. 1, 1977, Uppsala. However, I was unable to locate this document for further scrutiny.

Emmanuel Mbogo, a well-known Swahili playwright, novelist and short story writer is another author to use MPs in his novel *Vipuli vya Figo* (Kidney's Spare parts, 1995/2008). The novel mainly talks about the evils of the political leaders especially Dr. Matoga who is a medical doctor by training but quits his career and engages in politics. He becomes the Minister for Health but due to a medicine theft he is dismissed from his ministerial position. He vacates the government house and goes to live in a poor neighbourhood which is characterized by poor houses, garbage dumps and poor infrastructure. He then embarks on a rare and lucrative business of exporting human hearts and kidneys abroad. Later, he and his colleagues start an opposition political party so that he becomes a political leader again to shield his illegal business. Mbogo (2008:85) (through a character Dr. Matoga) uses two proverbs as follows:

3

MP3 *Mshuka ngazi hupanda ngazi hadi juu* (One who descends climbs to the topmost point).

TP3 *Mpanda ngazi hushuka* (One who ascends eventually descends).

The novel uses both proverbs (TP and MP) as indicated above in a responsive way; Dr. Matoga uses the MP to respond to TP. TP shows metaphorically that those on the higher rank of the economic and socio-political ladder will ultimately come down while the MP sees that there is also a possibility of climbing the ladder again. This MP satirizes and hints on the reluctance of some (African) leaders to relinquish their leadership positions even if their reign is over, have ruled for a long time or have committed a scandal. As for the TPs, the MPs allow artists to comment on various issues in society as well as to exercise an artistic freedom. As Mieder (2008) points out "proverbs speak louder than words."

In addition, Euphrase Kezilahabi, a well renowned Kiswahili scholar, poet, novelist and short story writer, is also a notable scholar to use MP in *Dhifa* (Feast, 2008). His book contains a collection of poems reflecting post socialist Tanzanian leaders in this era of globalization. The blurb of the book reads:

Feast is an anthology that consists of a sharp voice that leaves a big echo in the ear of a reader. It exposes the evils and defects in the life of the rulers and leaders who are characterized by gluttony at the feast of biting their nations for greediness while the citizens are suffering...It is a voice that provokes a reader to look at his society and life with an inquisitive eye. This anthology employs humour, voice and satire to convey its message to the citizens of our countries in this era of globalization.¹¹

¹¹ My translation.

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In this book of 52 poems, it is the poem *Zimwi* (Ghost) (pg. 40) that uses MP as follows:

4

MP4 *Zimwi Litujualo Limetula Likatwisha* (A ghost that knows us has devoured us completely).

TP4 *Zimwi Likujualo Halikuli Likakwisha* (A ghost that knows you cannot devour you completely).

Many Kiswahili TPs refer to the third or second person and use the present or habitual tense. The difference between the two versions of the proverbs is that the MP uses pronoun ‘us’ instead of TP’s ‘you singular’ and a perfect tense instead of a present.

According to TP a ghost (i.e. a relative or friend) can not kill you or is not completely harmful especially when it knows you. On the contrary, ghost which is referred to MP of this poem is lethal as it has completely eaten the people. In this book Kezilahabi critiques on various issues such as political leaders and politics, dependent economy and modern culture in Tanzania and in many African countries. As Wamitila in the ‘Introduction’ of this book also comments that “the poet wants his readers to inquire, question, examine and pry their selves, lives, environment, country and universe”.

In Kiswahili literature, *Zimwi* (Ghost) can metaphorically be used to refer to dictatorship leadership system (Senkoro 2006: 25) or neo-colonialism (Omary 2015). For instance, with regard to this poem, Omary argues that the ghost (neo-colonialism) has eaten everything in Africa. The ghost knows well the African continent and its economic resources because it colonized it before independence. It has now come back to plunder and exploit all economic resources such as minerals, gas, wildlife and oil (Omary 2015). Ghost may also denote an authority, political party¹² or a leader who misuses funds to the extent that the citizens (the masses) do not benefit from the economic resources of the country. Thus, the same word may be used variedly referring to different contexts.

What a coincidence, the four Swahili writers (Mhando, Mochiwa, Mbogo and Kezilahabi) whose works are discussed in this paper were born in the 1940s¹³. With regard to writers who were born in that period Kezilahabi (1995: 58, see also Kipacha 2014: 118) notes that “Their works criticize the colonial and post colonial rule and its ideology [and] their views are in argument with those of the past”. In fact, MPs have become an important device in the hands of

¹² www.wanabidii.net when bloggers discussed on the topic “Tanzania – Change is Yet to Come” in 2010 general elections (last visited 23-12-2015).

¹³ Kezilahabi (b. 1944-), Mbogo (b. 1947-), Mhando (b. 1948-) and Mochiwa (b.1940s-2008).

literary writers in commenting, satirizing and critiquing Tanzania's post colonial socio-political issues and practices. They also intend to incite reactions and create awareness to the readers of what is going on in society. People and scholars use proverbs to "increase the clarity, as well as the semantic effect of what they intend to say" (Orwenjo 2009: 123). The importance of using proverbs among poets, speakers or artists "does not lie only in what it reveals of the thoughts of the past or wisdom. Familiarity with its techniques enables a poet to create his own versions out of traditional proverbs. This enables him to avoid hackneyed expressions and give a certain amount of freshness to his speech" or his work of art (Nketia 1958: 21 cited in Finnegan 2012: 379-380). The role of the literary writers on the creation, use and spread of MPs cannot be ignored. As the readers read these works these MPs become acquainted to them and consequently reach a larger society. The following section discusses MPs in social network sites.

Swahili Modern Proverbs on Social Network Sites

As said earlier, Swahili modern proverbs are increasingly created and used by many people, including social network users. Social media networks contain a new direction of communication techniques which are used by many people, especially the youth (Mnenuka 2012). As a result, MPs that are created and posted on the websites challenge the notion that proverb authorship is ascribed to anonymous, "elders and ancestors, to whom the qualities of wisdom, responsibility and exemplary behaviour are attributed" (Yankah 1999:206, see also Schipper 2006, Finnegan 2012). In the present day "The youths say loud and clear the truth that expresses their realities like the traditional proverbs may not be able to" (Daniel 2016: 4, 12). Social network sites provide a fertile ground for youth to deliberately contribute to the MPs. As a topic on this digital forum reads *Methali zangu mpya: Mchango kwa lugha ya Kiswahili / My new proverbs: Contribution to Swahili language*¹⁴. More than a hundred MPs are available on this forum that have been posted since 2012. The conversations hereunder between participants on that forum reveal their enthusiasm¹⁵:

Bigirita Nyie ndio wahenga wa siku zijazo...keep it up. Vitukuu vyenu vitakuwa vinatumia hizi methali, vitakuwa vinasema 'wahenga walisema samaki mmoja akioza mtupe' bila kujua hao 'wahenga' ni akina Lizzy.

You are the ancestors of the future...keep it up. Your great grandchildren will be using these proverbs, they will be saying 'ancestors said If a fish gets rotten throw

¹⁴<http://www.jamiiforums.com/jukwaa-la-lugha/61373-methali-zangu-mpya-mchango-kwa-lugha-ya-kiswahili.html>.

¹⁵<http://www.jamiiforums.com/jukwaa-la-lugha/208842-methali-print.html>.

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it away'¹⁶ without knowing that those 'ancestors' are Lizzy and friends (My translation).

Lizzy Halafu wahenga sie tunazingatia uhalisi, vitukuu lazima watukubali.

As we (present) ancestors take into consideration the reality, great grandchildren will definitely accept our proverbs (My translation).

In the forum the users post their Swahili MPs, as well as providing comments pertaining to the topic (as a quotation above reveals). It is the expectation of these 'modern ancestors' that the proverbs they create "when repeated and applied by others over time, may win acceptance and gain admission into the community's treasury" (Yankah, 1999: 205); consequently "they grow Swahili literature" (Mnenuka 2012). The motive for these modern proverbs as suggested by the contributors themselves is "to try to modernize them so that they cope with the contemporary life"¹⁷ and respond to the existing challenges in society. The TPs are reworked to suit the contemporary perception, worldview and wisdom. Youth are a very significant agent in creating MPs (cf. Mnenuka 2012, Kipacha 2014, Mieder 2014) and social networks are a good site for them to convey their creation.

Some of the MPs available on the websites visited and our analysis are as follow:

5

MP5a *Jambo usilolijua uliza Google* (A matter of which you are ignorant about search on Google).

TP5a *Jambo usilolijua ni sawa na usiku wa kiza* (A matter that you are ignorant about is like a dark night).

MP5b *Penye miti mingi, wanatunza sana mazingira* (Where there are many trees, they greatly conserve environment)¹⁸.

TP5b *Penye miti hapana wajenzi* (Where there are trees, there are no builders).

The TP5a means that if a person does something that s/he does not know s/he will end up in vain like someone who is in darkness cannot see anything. The MP5a, to reflect the contemporary world, hints on the role of technological development and web search engines such as Google in search of information. The TP5b can be used in the context where there are several opportunities but there is none to explore or develop them. For instance, it is possible to live in an area where

¹⁶ See the TP of this MP in example No. 10.

¹⁷ <http://www.jamiiforums.com/jukwaa-la-lugha/208842-methali-print.html>.

¹⁸ Check its variant in Appendix item No. 20.

there are plenty of trees, but still people live in the broken houses. In this proverb the reference is made to the trees as in the past people mainly used tree poles to build their houses. But in MP5b as today there are several other building materials; availability of many trees in a certain area is associated with the issue of environmental conservation. The environment conservation is highly emphasized today due to environmental destruction resulted by human activities or natural calamities. Balogun (2006) rightly argues that truth expressed by proverbs is not necessarily limited to moral truth. Rather, such truth extends to epistemological, metaphysical, aesthetical, legal, scientific and anthropological facts (2006: 86 cited in Fayemi 2009: 6).

As a matter of fact, some MPs are laden with humour, jokes and look playful (cf. Raji-Oyelade, 1999, Mnenuka 2012, Kipacha 2014, Meider 2014). For instance, MPs entitled as *Methali “mpya” za Kiswahili cha Kidosi* / New Proverbs of Indian Swahili¹⁹ seem to evoke a joke on Swahili spoken by Indian communities in Tanzania. On that website (actually these proverbs are also available in several blogs [see References]) the blogger jokingly says that these MPs (there were twenty six) were the responses to a Proverbial Test administered to an Indian student. Some of those proverbs are:

6

- MP6a *Simba mwenda pole/kimya jua iko gonjwa au haina njaa* (A silent-walking lion is either sick or not hungry)²⁰.
- TP6a *Simba mwenda pole/kimya ndiye mla nyama* (A silent-walking lion is ultimately the one that eats meat).
- MP6b *Akumulikaye mchana, kipofu huyo* (He who shines a light on you at day time, is blind)²¹.
- TP6b *Akumulikaye mchana usiku atakuchoma* (One who shines light on you at day time, will harm you at night).
- MP6c *Penye kuku wengi chinja bili, tatu, menyeye hapana jua* (Where there are many chickens slaughter two or three the owner will not notice).
- TP6c *Penye kuku wengi usimwage mtama* (Where there are many chickens do not spill millet).

¹⁹ Found on <http://wayuti.weebly.com/news-blog/methali-mpya-za-kiswahili-cha-kidosi>. Note also the distortion of spellings in some words.

²⁰ Check its variant in Appendix item No. 36.

²¹ Check its variant in Appendix item No. 5.

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The TP6a is figuratively used to mean that anyone (e.g. animal, human being) who embarks on doing a particular task carefully and wisely will eventually succeed. But its MP6a is coined in a funny way that if a lion walks slowly it might be sick or not hungry! On the other hand, the TP6b cautions that if someone has a tendency to spy on your life may harm you some day. This can be used to refer to bad people such as witches, bandits, thieves or any other enemy who have a habit of spying on other people that they will eventually harm them. Interestingly, the MP6b considers that “He who shines a light on you during day time is blind”. Although normally people do not need light to see things during day time, as people with disability in many societies may face social stereotypes and prejudices (cf. Teferra 1994, Teklu 2010). The reference in this MP is made to blind persons just to ridicule them. In addition, the TP6c is used to advise people not to divulge their secret in public, because they will spread it to other people. Thus, do not spill millet where there are many chickens as they will consume it. On the contrary, the MP6c sees that if there are many chickens some of them can be slaughtered and the owner cannot recognize it. Many MPs found in this study “lack heavy metaphors” (Mnenuka 2012). This confirms that “Proverbs, by their very nature, are often metaphorical, but they are also diverse and unsystematized” (Yankah 1984: 16).

Some MPs also employ various techniques such as “puns, wordplays, satire, parody, and irony as a means of questioning the wisdom of the underlying proverbs” (Militz & Militz 1999:31, see also Raji-Oyelade, 2004: 308). For instance, the politicians are parodied and ridiculed as follows:

7

MP7a *Njia ya muongo, kuwa mwanasiasa* (If you want to be a liar be a politician)²².

TP7a *Njia ya muongo ni fupi* (The way of a liar is short).

The TP7a used to warn liars that their lies will one day be known, because everything has got an end. However, in the contemporary Tanzania the MP7a has been created to reflect the multi-party Tanzania where some political candidates vie for various positions to fulfil their personal interests, instead of serving the people who put them into power. These “post-proverbs make perfect common sense in communication; they stack reality to fit into the modern world which their creators and users live in” (Daniel 2016:10). “While such parodies might be quite humorous, they also often express serious socio-political satire” (Mieder 1997:416) in the contemporary Tanzania.

In addition, the notion of patience and ‘No hurry’ is now negated as the following MPs reveal:

²² Several hip hop artists also talk about the ‘lies’ of the politicians, for example Mr. II’s *Hali Halisi* (The Real Situation) and Afande Sele’s *Darubini Kali* (Sharp Telescope).

8

- MP8a *Pole pole yachelewesha* (Slowly causes a delay)²³.
 TP8a *Pole pole ndio mwendo* (Slowly is indeed the pace).
 MP8b *Aliye juu mfuata/mpandie huko huko*²⁴ (One who is up, follow him/her there).
 TP8b *Aliye juu mngoje chini* (One who is up wait for him/her at the bottom).
 MP8c *Mvumilivu Hula Mbovu* (A patient person eats the rotten fruit).
 TP8c *Mvumilivu Hula Mbivu* (A patient person eats the ripe fruit).

While TP8a is used to advise people to do their things without hurry so that they get good results, the MP8a sees that things have to be done quickly. Likewise, whilst TP8b reminds people on the higher rank of the economic and political ladder that they will one day come down (lose their position) and encourage the poor or people of low status that those in power or who have good life will one day live 'normal' life. In contrast, MP8b insists that there is no need to wait for a person to come down, but you rather struggle for that better position as well (by vying for various posts, pursuing further education or working hard). Regarding TP8c, which is used to encourage someone that in order to succeed in life one has to have patience, but MP8c sees that patience does not pay as it can make you suffer more (eat the rotten fruit). These MPs might be partly prompted by unfulfilled promises made by the political leaders and life hardships among the citizens, hence the urge for quick solution or immediate action for economic wellbeing of a given society.

Likewise, the discouraging proverbs are turned into encouragement. This can be better exemplified in the following proverbs:

9

- MP9a *Mtaka yote hupata japo moja* (One who wants all will get at least one).
 TP9a *Mtaka yote hukosa yote* (One who wants all loses all).
 MP9b *La Kuvunda Lina Ubani* (There is a panacea to what is rotten).
 TP9b *La Kuvunda Halina Ubani* (There is no panacea for what is rotten).

The TP9a is mainly used to refer to a person who wants everything at once s/he will end up losing all. This is because s/he will fail to concentrate on one thing. In contrast, MP9a sees this is not always true as one may end up getting, at least, one thing. TP9b is spoken when a thing or person has been spoiled or damaged to the extent that it cannot be amended or corrected. Con-

²³ See other similar proverbs in Appendix items No. 19 & 33.

²⁴ See also Mnenuka (2012), Kipacha (2014: 112).

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versely, the MP9b sees that there is a possibility of correcting something/someone spoiled. In support of these MPs and from religious perspective Kamugisha (2015) points out that TPs such as ‘There is no panacea for what is rotten’ and ‘Spilt water cannot be gathered’ are discouraging. He points out that these proverbs mean that if a thing is damaged, it cannot be amended. These are satanic ideas because “for with God nothing shall be impossible” (cited in Luke 1: 37).

Some of MPs have been structurally extended to have three parts, instead of two. The third part seems to be a response to a respective proverb. For instance:

10

MP10a *Ndege mjanja, hunaswa na tundu bovu, lakini hakosi kujinasua* (A cunning bird, can be trapped by a damaged cage, but it must escape).

TP10a *Ndege mjanja, hunaswa na tundu bovu* (A cunning bird is trapped by a damaged cage).

MP10b *Samaki mmoja akioza, mtupe, asipotupwa ataozesha wenzake* (If one fish rots, throw it away, otherwise it will spoil the others).

TP10b *Samaki mmoja akioza, huoza wote* (If one fish rots, it spoils all the others).

MP10c *Ng’ombe wa masikini hazai, akizaa huzaa dume, na huyo dume huwa shoga* (The cow of a poor person does not give birth, if it produces is a male, who turns out to be gay).

TP10c *Ng’ombe wa masikini hazai* (The cow of a poor person does not give birth).

The TP10a is referred to when talking about a person who thinks that he/she is adept or clever in doing things but unexpectedly he/she can be defeated by a small trick. But the MP10a sees that even if this clever person can fail to do a small thing but he/she will finally resolve it. The TP10b is used when talking about persons who live with or have a bad companion and, consequently, such ‘bad’ person influences others in his/her a habit. Nevertheless, the MP10b seems to suggest that a rotten fish (bad person) has to be discarded (avoided). The TP10c is metaphorically used to refer to a poor person who is working hard, but always remains poor. The MP10c makes out that even if it gives birth it is always a male who turns out to be gay. In Tanzania homosexuality is not legally accepted, therefore in the context of this proverb to have a gay son it is not something of pride. Many Kiswahili proverbs, apart from metrical and rhyme patterns, are made of two parts; the introductory clause and the explanatory clause (Ngole & Lucas 1981, Mulokozi 1996). In the above MPs, the third part is added to incorporate more views of the contemporary generation and culture. A good example is the issue of homosexuality which is apparent in many countries, including Tanzania.

Some MPs seem to respond to the TPs. For example (starting with TP then MP):

11

TP11a *Akili ni nywele kila mtu ana zake* (Intelligence is like hair every person has his/her own).

MP11a *Kama akili ni nywele basi ubongo ni nyusi* (If Intelligence is like hair then brain is like an eye brow)²⁵.

TP11b *Mwerevu hajinyoi, akijinyoa hujikata* (A clever person cannot shave himself otherwise he will cut himself).

MP11b *Mwerevu hujinyoa kubana matumizi* (A clever person shaves himself to save money).

TP11b *Nyani haoni kundule* (The ape sees not his own hinder parts).

MP11b *Nyani akitaka kuona kundule, atumie kioo* (If ape wants to see his hinder parts it should use a mirror).

These MPs show the youth are innovative and creative. TP11a means that no two people are alike in reasoning capacity. This can be used when referring to a task that is/was performed differently by two people or when advising someone to do things that are useful to him/her. However, the MP11a does not seem to be very significant as it further compares a brain with an eye brow. Regarding the TP11b is used to mean that whatever clever or rich one is, he/she cannot solve all of his/her problems or live without cooperation with other people. The MP11b looks humorous, in connection to life hardship by many Tanzanians; it simply sees that “a clever person shaves himself to save money”. With regard to TP11c, it is figuratively used to warn people who always like to reproach others but unable to see their faults. As for other MPs in this section, MP11c looks too funny and impossible for an ape to use a mirror to watch its bottom. These MPs reveal that in fact, “Proverbs don’t always have to be didactic and prescriptive; they can also be full of satire, irony, and humour” (Mieder 1997:416, 2014:21). As these MPs are found on various blogs and forums, some of them may gain extensive prevalence in society.

The use of street language (e.g. slang) and code mixing is also appearing in these new proverbs. The following MPs demonstrate:

12

MP12a *Asiyekuwepo machoni unam-delete* (One who is out of sight delete him/her).

²⁵ See also Kipacha (2014:105).

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TP12a *Asiyekuwepo machoni na moyoni hayupo* (Out of sight, out of mind).

MP12b *Mchuma janga imekula kwake* (He/she who gets calamity, is up to him/her)

TP12b *Mchuma janga hula na wa kwao* (He/she who gets calamity, affects his/her relatives).

It is a common phenomenon that the urban and youth languages are characterized by slang, code mixing and borrowing. As these MPs on these websites are mainly created by youth they also manifest these features. They include Swahili slang and English loan words. The reason behind is “to demonstrate being up-to-date in a globalised world” (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006: 3, Omari 2011) and are the results of urbanism and modernity (Beck 2010). For instance, the word ‘delete’ is widely used in the language of the electronic devices such as computers, mobile phones, iPods, etc, which are widely used today, as a result MP12b sees that if someone is out of sight it is better to delete him/her. Also, while TP12b states that one who is in trouble or difficulty, definitely consults his/her relatives for assistance, the MP12b suggests that no assistance will be provided to the trouble maker; he/she will face the consequences. The MP12b hints on the increasing “individualism” in the contemporary African societies (Mbiti 2011: 225) and post-socialist Tanzania (cf. Kipacha 2014).

My data demonstrate that it is mainly the second part of the proverb that is mainly prone to change. However, a few alterations may occur in the first portion or anywhere (see MP4). For instance, *Lila na fila havitangamani* (Good and evil are incompatible) has become *Kula na kuliwa havitangamani* (To eat and to be eaten are incompatible). With regard to the features demonstrated by the MPs, to some extent, my findings are consistent with the existing literature on the subject. These features, among others, include some MPs having variants, humour and also twist a negative proverb into its positive, and vice versa. The alterations can be manifested in sound, tense, sentence length, metaphor, content, worldview and language use (cf. Kuusi 1994, Raji-Oyelade 1999, Mutembei 2007, Kipacha 2012, Mnenuka 2012, Mieder 2014).

Conclusion

MPs are an important aspect of everyday discourse. The need to cope with today’s environment and worldview, technological and scientific development, political activities in multiparty Tanzania, increasing neo-colonialism and globalization are very important factors to their emergence. To suit the contemporary worldview the Swahili TPs are altered in form and content. A number of Swahili MPs are still growing, and what I presented here is just a small portion. Their prevalence is also found in other Swahili societies in East and Central Africa (however studies are needed). This study discloses that Swahili literary writers make use of modern proverbs since many decades ago. MPs, as for traditional proverbs, are seriously used to support the content

discussed and convey the intended message to their readers. On the other hand, MPs available on the weblogs and forums are passionately created, circulated and discussed by their contributors. These MPs may be didactic, humorous, misspelled and double-entendre: they are both philosophical and some of them to some extent superficial, “simple and direct” (Raji-Oyelade 2004: 308). The emergence of the MPs concurs with Kezilahabi (1988: 22) in his poem *Mbegu* (A Seed), that “It is an old perception to think that grey haired people are wise” because the young generation are also wise (cf. Daniel 2016). MPs from both sources (analogy and digital) play an important role in spreading, using and urging changes in this long-standing genre of literature. In fact this had been happening since the time immemorial but some of these changes and/or development passed unrecorded.

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Appendix: Some TPs and their MPs counter parts²⁶

Traditional Swahili Proverbs (TPs)	Modern Proverbs (MPs)
<i>Mwana wa kuku hafunzwi kuchakura</i> A chick is not taught how to rifle the ground	<i>Mtoto wa samaki hafundishwi kuogelea</i> A baby fish is not taught how to swim
<i>Adhabu ya kaburi aijuaye maiti</i> The torture of the grave is known to/by the dead.	<i>Adhabu ya kaburi aijuaye mchimbaji</i> The torture of the grave is known by/to the grave-digger.
<i>Aisifuye mvua imemnyea</i> One who praises rain has been rained on	<i>Aisifiaye mvua ni mkulima</i> One who praises a rain must be a farmer <i>Aisifiaye mvua hajawai kuishi mabondeni</i> One who praises a rain has never lived in the valley
<i>Akili nyingi huondoa maarifa</i> Too much intelligence diminishes strategy/knowledge	<i>Akili nyingi utapasi mtihani</i> Too much intelligence will enable you pass exams
<i>Akumulikaye mchana usiku ukuchoma</i> One who shines light on you at day time, will harm you at night	<i>Akumulikae mchana usiku atalala</i> One who shines light on you at day time, he/she will fall asleep at night
<i>Alalaye usimwamshe, ukimwamsha utalala wewe</i> Don't awake one who is asleep; if you awaken him/her, you too will fall asleep.	<i>Alalaye usimuamshe, ukimuamsha mtagombana</i> Don't awaken one who is asleep; if you awaken him/her up, you will quarrel

²⁶ This is mainly a literal translation. Those proverbs that have been mentioned in a text are not mentioned again in this Appendix.

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	<p><i>Alalaye usimuamshe, ukimuamsha mtakesha wote</i></p> <p>Don't awaken one who is asleep; if you awaken him/her, you will both stay awake</p> <p><i>Alalaye usimuamshe, ukimuamsha atapoteza usingizi</i></p> <p>Don't awaken one who is asleep; if you awaken him/her, he/she will lose the sleep</p>
<p><i>Aliye kando, haangukiwi na mti</i></p> <p>He who stays to the side will not be hit by a falling tree</p>	<p><i>Aliye kando, amekupisha njia</i></p> <p>He who stays to the side, has given you a way</p>
<p><i>Asiyekubali kushindwa si mshindani</i></p> <p>One who does not admit defeat is not a competitor</p>	<p><i>Asiyekubali kushindwa ndie mshindi</i></p> <p>One who does not admit defeat is indeed the winner</p>
<p><i>Asiyekujua, hakuthamini</i></p> <p>He who does not know you, does not value you.</p>	<p><i>Asiyekujua usimjue</i></p> <p>He who does not know you, don't know him too</p>
<p><i>Asiyesikia la mkuu huvunjika guu</i></p> <p>He who does not heed the elder's/senior's advice, breaks his leg</p>	<p><i>Asiyesikia la mkuu tapeleka jela</i></p> <p>He who does not heed the elder's/senior's advice, will be sent to jail</p> <p><i>Asiyesikia la mkuu husikiliza la mdogo</i></p> <p>He who does not heed the elder's/senior's advice, listens to the junior</p>
<p><i>Atangaye sana na jua hujua</i></p> <p>He who wanders around in the sun learns</p>	<p><i>Atangaye na jua huungua</i></p> <p>He who wanders around in the sun gets burn</p>
<p><i>Bahati ya mwenzio usilalie mlango wazi</i></p> <p>Do not leave a door open for someone's luck</p>	<p><i>Bahati ya mwenzio yaweza kuwa yako</i></p> <p>Someone's luck might be yours</p>

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<i>Barabara ndefu haikosi kona</i> A long road must have corners/curves	<i>Barabara ndefu ongeza mwendo au utachelewa kufika</i> For a long road speed up otherwise you will arrive late
<i>Dawa ya moto, ni moto</i> The remedy to fire is fire.	<i>Dawa ya moto ni maji</i> The remedy to fire is water.
<i>Fadhila ya punda mateke</i> The gratitude of a donkey is kicks	<i>Fadhila ya punda kubeba mzigo</i> The gratitude/kindness of a donkey is to carry load
<i>Fuata nyuki ule asali</i> Follow the bees so that you eat honey	<i>Fuata nyuki utoke manundu</i> Follow the bees in order to be stung (get humps)
<i>Haba na haba, hujaza kibaba</i> Little and little fills up the measure	<i>Haba na haba, haba mbili</i> Little and little is equal to two littles
<i>Hasira ya mkizi furaha ya mvuvi</i> The anger of a cuttle-fish is a happiness of a fisherman	<i>Hasira za mkizi atatafuna wewe</i> An angry cuttle-fish can eat you
<i>Kawia, ufike</i> It is better to delay in order to ensure a safe arrival (i.e. Better late than never)	<i>Kawia uchelewe</i> When you delay you will arrive late
<i>Penye miti hapana wajenzi</i> Where there are trees, there are no builders.	<i>Penye miti mingi, hakuna wa kuikata</i> Where there are many trees, there is no one to cut them
<i>Maji yakimwagika hayazoleki</i> Spilt water cannot be gathered	<i>Maji yakimwagika mwambie dada atapiga deki</i> If water is spilt tell a sister (maid) will mop it
<i>Mbio za sakafuni huishia ukingoni</i> Running on the floor finishes at the edge	<i>Mbio za utelezini zitachafua nguo yako</i> Running on the slippery area can soil your cloth
<i>Mchagua jembe si mkulima</i> One who selects a hoe is not a real farmer	<i>Mchagua jembe ana akili</i> One who selects a hoe is intelligent

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<i>Mchimba kisima huingia mwenyewe</i> A well-digger enters it by himself	<i>Mchimba kisima huepuka adha za EWURA²⁷</i> A well-digger avoids EWURA's troubles
<i>Mfa maji haishi kutapatapa</i> A drowning man will clutch at a straw	<i>Mfa maji tampa life jacket</i> A drowning man will be given a life jacket
<i>Mficha maradhi mauti humuumbua</i> One who hides sickness death reveals him	<i>Mficha maradhi ataenda Loliondo</i> One who hides sickness will go to Loliondo ²⁸
<i>Mficha uchi, hazai</i> One who hides his/her private parts cannot bear children	<i>Mficha uchi, atakuwa amevaa nguo.</i> One who hides his/her private parts must have dressed up <i>Mficha uchi, hajui raha ya mapenzi.</i> One who hides his/her private parts does not know the joy of love
<i>Mgema akisifiwa tembo hulitia maji</i> If a palm-wine tapper is praised for his wine, he dilutes it with water.	<i>Mgema akisifiwa hutoa ofa kwa wateja</i> If a palm-wine tapper is praised for his wine, he gives offer to his customers
<i>Mgeni njoo, mwenyeji apone</i> A guest comes so that the host may benefit	<i>Mgeni njoo, mwenyeji afilisike</i> A guest comes so that the host incurs expenses <i>Mgeni njoo, mwenyeji aingie gharama</i> A guest comes so that the host becomes broke
<i>Mkataa wengi mchawi</i> One who refuses to be with many is a witch	<i>Mkataa wingi ataenda CHADEMA</i> One who refuses to be with many will go for CHADEMA ²⁹

²⁷ The Energy and Water Utilities Regulatory Authority in Tanzania.

²⁸ Is a place in Arusha - Tanzania where found a traditional healer popularly known as Babu.

²⁹ It is an opposition political party in Tanzania.

SWAHILI MODERN PROVERBS: THE ROLE OF LITERARY WRITERS AND SOCIAL
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<p><i>Mtaka cha uvunguni sharti ainame</i></p> <p>He who wants that which is under the bed must bend over for it.</p>	<p><i>Mtaka cha uvunguni sharti ainue/asogeze kitanda</i></p> <p>He who wants something which is under the bed must lift/move the bed</p> <p><i>Mtaka cha uvunguni ajue ataumiza kiuno na mugongo</i></p> <p>He who wants something which is under the bed must hurt his waist and back</p>
<p><i>Mtoto akililia wembe mpe</i></p> <p>If a child cries for a razor give it to him</p>	<p><i>Mtoto akililia wembe usimpe atajikata</i></p> <p>If a child cries for a razor don't give it to him he will cut himself</p> <p><i>Mtoto akililia wembe, keshauta nywele za ukubwani</i></p> <p>If a child cries for a razor he must have pubic hair</p>
<p><i>Mwenda pole hajikwai</i></p> <p>One who walks slowly/carefully does not stumble</p>	<p><i>Mwenda pole atachelewa kufika</i></p> <p>One who walks slowly will arrive late</p>
<p><i>Penye udhia penyeza rupia</i></p> <p>Where there is trouble, make use of a rupee</p>	<p><i>Penye udhia kimbia</i></p> <p>Where there is trouble, run away</p>
<p><i>Samaki mkuje angali mbichi</i></p> <p>Bend a fish while it is still fresh</p>	<p><i>Samaki mkunje ndo utamfaidi wakati wa kumla</i></p> <p>Bend a fish in order to enjoy it when eating</p>
<p><i>Simba mwenda pole/kimya ndio mla nyama</i></p> <p>A silent-walking lion is ultimately the one that eats meat</p>	<p><i>Simba mwenda pole kafungwa na/au anamuogopa Yanga</i></p> <p>A slow-walking Lion has been beaten by or is afraid of Yanga³⁰</p>

³⁰ Simba and Yanga are popular rival soccer teams in Tanzania.

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<p><i>Ukiona vyaelea jua vimeumdwa</i></p> <p><i>If you see vessels afloat, know that they have been built.</i></p>	<p><i>Ukiona vinaelea iko nyepesi hiyo or vimo safarini</i></p> <p>When you see vessels floating means that they are light or are on safari</p>
<p><i>Ukitaka uzuri, sharti udhurike</i></p> <p>If you want beauty, you must be harmed</p>	<p><i>Ukitaka uzuri sharti ulipie</i></p> <p>If you want beauty, you must pay for it</p>
<p><i>Usipoziba ufa utajenga ukuta</i></p> <p>If you don't seal a crack you will have to build a wall (A stitch in time saves nine)</p>	<p><i>Usipoziba ufa, mwizi atachungulia ndani.</i></p> <p>If you don't seal a crack a thief will peep in</p>
<p><i>Usisafirie nyota ya mwenzio</i></p> <p>Do not travel on someone else's star. (Do not rely on other's success or fortune.)</p>	<p><i>Usisafirie nyota ya mwenzio kama hujalipia.</i></p> <p>Do not travel on someone else's star if you haven't paid for it</p>
<p><i>Mpanda farasi wawili hupasuka msamba</i> One who rides two horses at once will split apart</p>	<p><i>Mpanda farasi wawili, huyo mwanasarakasi</i></p> <p>One who rides two horses at once is an acrobat</p>
<p><i>Kila ndege hutua katika mti aupendao</i></p> <p>Each bird perches on its favourite tree.</p>	<p><i>Kila ndege hutua/huruka Airport</i></p> <p>Each plane lands/takes off at the Airport.</p>